LIBYA’S DISSIDENTS

Andrew Solomon accurately depicts Libya as a police state where Colonel Muammar Qaddafi controls all levers of power, but there is little hope that his son, Saif, will actually see through the reforms he purports to champion (“Circle of Fire,” May 8th). Saif’s self-described human-rights organization is funded by the state, and his human-rights record speaks for itself; his description of terrorism as “tactics” could hardly be termed a renunciation. More space in Solomon’s piece might have been devoted to those Libyan dissidents who are imprisoned or were killed because they advocated for justice and spoke the truth—such as some twelve hundred political prisoners, who were executed in June, 1996, at the Abu Sliem prison, and the journalist Daif al-Ghazali, whose mutilated body was found in Benghazi in June, 2005, and whose death still has not been investigated.

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DOGS BEHAVING BADLY

In his article on Cesar Millan, Malcolm Gladwell notes that “dogs are students of human movement” (“What the Dog Saw,” May 22nd). Implicit in this assertion is the fact that dogs know that we are not dogs, a point the ethologist and recognized canine behavioral expert Patricia McConnell, whom Gladwell refers to in the article, makes in her book “The Other End of the Leash.” Why, then, does Millan insist on using an archaic interpretation of “pack theory” to describe dog-human relations? Millan proclaims that dog owners must be “pack leaders.” He mimics a dog’s mouth with his hands, and uses “alpha rollovers,” a technique that has been disavowed by those who first recommended its use. Gladwell’s article skirts the content of Millan’s teachings, and focuses instead on how Millan moves. This is an interesting take on the “Dog Whisperer,” but it also runs the risk of validating Millan’s position as a behavioral expert. It might have been worth mentioning that Dr. Nicholas Dodman, the director of the Animal Behavior Clinic at Tufts University’s Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, told the Times, “My college thinks it is a travesty. We’ve written to National Geographic Channel and told them they have put dog training back twenty years.”

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HOME INSURANCE

James Surowiecki, in his article on home-price insurance, justly praises efforts to build a financial market that would provide individuals with a way to hedge against a decrease in the value of their houses (The Financial Page, May 8th). However, home owners who intend to live in their houses for the rest of their lives are already largely insured against movement in housing prices. A decrease in the value of your house also decreases the cost of living in it, because it reduces the income you forgo by not selling it or renting it out. This greatly cushions any risk associated with housing-price volatility. While housing futures are still potentially valuable as insurance (e.g., for those who intend to use their home equity for retirement income or those anticipating a move), analysis of the housing-price risk is sorely incomplete without recognition of the fact that most home owners are only mildly exposed to this risk.

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